

# ST. BEDE ABBEY POSTULANCY POLICY

## Section One: The Nature, Purpose and Length of the Postulancy

A) Nature and General Purpose of the Postulancy: Postulancy is the first phase of initial formation for the religious life and is a preparation for the novitiate. Its purpose in general is twofold: to help the postulant in his personal exploration of his calling and to help the community to make a tentative judgment whether he has the aptitude for our form of religious life and has reached a degree of human and spiritual maturity that will enable him to enter the novitiate.

B) More specifically the postulancy aims to:

- 1) permit a gradual psychological and spiritual transition from lay life to life in the novitiate; foster the postulant's self-knowledge and further his growth in the human and spiritual maturity necessary for the novitiate;
- 2) introduce him in an experiential way into the spirituality and values of our way of life;
- 3) enable him to grow in knowledge and experience of its members, the customs and the varieties of work of the community;
- 4) provide a study program that will allow the postulant to grow in his knowledge of religious subjects, especially sacred scripture and liturgy, in the degree judged necessary for novitiate training.

C) Length of Postulancy: This is to be determined by the time required to fulfill the purposes outlined above. It may vary from three months to two years. As a general rule at least three months should be allowed for a person to prepare for novitiate. In each case, the length of the postulancy is determined by the abbot after consultation with the vocation director and postulant master, before the postulancy begins; the time may be shortened or lengthened if this later seems desirable. The postulant is free to leave the postulancy at any time and may be asked to do so (*The Constitutions and the Directory of the American-Cassinense Congregation* D 36.2.6).

## Section Two: Admission to the Postulancy

A) When the required documents have been submitted by the candidate and the necessary evaluations have been made, the abbot, having consulted with the vocation director and the senior council, may admit the candidate to the postulancy (*The Constitutions and the Directory of the American-Cassinense Congregation* D 36.2.1).

B) After the candidate has been accepted for the postulancy, the abbot, the vocation director and the postulant master will meet to discuss the specific goals and means for the postulancy program for this particular person and its length.

C) The postulant master will then interview the candidate before the postulancy begins to establish a working relationship with him. The master can verify and complete his picture of the candidate and his needs and discuss with him the various elements of the program. The candidate is free to make suggestions and seek clarifications.

## Section Three: The Role of the Abbot and Community in the Postulancy Program

A) The abbot: As spiritual father of the monastery the abbot has the ultimate responsibility for the postulancy policy and program. To assist in their implantation he appoints the postulant master, instructors and confessors. After appropriate consultation he admits a candidate to the postulancy, determines its length, and may dismiss a postulant or present him for admission to the novitiate. During the postulancy he is to support the postulant by prayer, word and example, meet with him monthly to discuss his experience of the community and of the postulancy, and each month to discuss his progress with the postulant master.

B) The community: The members of the community are to be conscious of their role and responsibility in the postulancy program. By their prayer, word and example they give concrete expression to the Benedictine way of life. Community members should support and encourage the postulant in his search for God's will. They are to be informed about the postulancy policy and program and should assist the postulant master as needed. If a community member has a concern about the behavior or attitude of a postulant, he should voice that concern to the postulant master.

#### **Section Four: The Postulant Master**

A) Responsibilities in general: The postulant master is the principal executor of the community's postulancy policy. He is to work in such a way that the purposes of the postulancy are fulfilled and continuity between formation during the postulancy and the novitiate are assured. He is to foster and assess the human and spiritual growth of the postulant, arrange the daily postulancy schedule, direct its study and work program and instruct the postulant in community observances.

B) Consultations: At the end of the first month of the postulancy the postulant master will consult with each teacher in the program and with those who have regular work contact with the postulant about how the latter is doing. Depending on the length of the postulancy, this procedure will be repeated every two months thereafter. In every case, seven weeks before the end of the postulancy, the postulant master will meet with the abbot, the postulant's teachers and those who have had regular or significant contact with him to assess his readiness for the novitiate.

C) Reports: When the length of the postulancy has been determined, it will be decided how often a report is to be made to the community on the postulant. Shortly after the postulant has been accepted and the postulancy program has been determined, the postulant master will give a report to the community with biographical information about the postulant and information about the postulancy program, including the schedule. Each month the postulant master will give the abbot an oral report on the postulant. Six weeks before the end of the postulancy he will prepare a written report on him that either be presented to the monastic chapter if the postulant is to be presented for the novitiate, or else will be put into the abbey's files.

D) Calendar: Once the length of the postulancy has been determined, the postulant master will prepare a calendar giving the dates for the consultation and reports outlines above and will give copies of it to those involved, including the postulant.

#### **Section Five: The Postulant and the Postulancy Program**

A) The Postulant's Responsibilities in General: From the beginning of his formation the postulant should be aware that growth in self-knowledge and in openness to the Spirit are at the heart of his vocational discernment. Active and responsible participation in the community's daily schedule and in the postulancy study and work program are expected of him.

B) Major Components of the Postulancy Program: While the program for each postulant may have different emphases because of varying personal needs, the overall aim of the program is to prepare the candidate for the novitiate and, when several postulants are together, to insure that as far as possible they enter the novitiate with fairly similar readiness for the novitiate formation program. The postulancy program is to have the following components:

- a) regular and frequent conferences with the postulant master in which the issue of human maturity is related to spiritual growth in the context of the postulant's daily life, and in which the postulant is encouraged to share his current postulancy experiences of prayer, work and community living;
- b) attention to the way the postulant handles personal relationships, social interaction with the community, study, personal and liturgical prayer, and work;
- c) assistance to the postulant, through study and discussion, in clarifying his motivation;

d) when necessary, formal instruction in the principles of human growth or consultation with a psychologist.

C) Program of Studies: This program, in which community members, including the postulant master, may be teachers, is to provide instruction, especially in the areas of religious knowledge and, as necessary, communication skills, that will serve as a proximate preparation for instruction in the novitiate. The program is to be adjusted to meet any new instructional needs discovered after the postulancy begins. If circumstances warrant, the postulant may take an appropriate course at the local junior college.

D) Work program: As far as possible the postulant is to be assigned a variety of work projects with a variety of community members, such as will allow the postulant to demonstrate responsibility and creativity and to contribute to the community's welfare. All work assignments are made by the postulant master or someone he designates. All requests for work are to be referred to the postulant master. At the beginning of the postulancy the postulant is to sign an agreement, drawn up in such a way as to conform to civil law, not to demand pay for any work done (cf. *The Constitutions and the Directory of the American-Cassinese Congregation* D 36.2.5).

E) Instruction in the Practicalities of Daily Living: The postulant is to receive:

- a) instruction for participation in the community's daily liturgy;
- b) initiation into the community's daily routine and customary way of doing things, and, when necessary, instruction in common courtesy, including table etiquette;
- c) information about laundry, toilet articles, stationary, mail, haircuts, etc.

The postulant master will make clear to him what is expected at his period of his formation, including what permissions he is expected to ask for.

F) Schedule of the Day: The daily schedule for the postulancy, arranged by the postulant master, is to allow a healthy integration with that of the community and with the postulant's need for privacy, personal prayer and leisure.

G) Postulancy Observances: The postulant is to follow the regulations laid down for all community members, with the following provisions for this initial step of formation:

- a) Clothing: The postulant does not wear religious garb but lay clothes appropriate to the variety of his activities. For liturgical functions (except Midday Prayer) and class, dress slacks and a good shirt or sweater are to be worn. A tie and sport coat are to be worn on Sundays and other major celebrations, e.g., Christmas.
- b) Supplies: Necessary supplies not available in the community store (spelunca) are to be requested from the postulant master.
- c) Money & Gifts: At the beginning of the postulancy the postulant gives to the postulant master the money he has with him; this is held in safe-keeping, together with any later monetary gifts the postulant may receive. All other gifts are also to be turned in to the postulant master, from whom permission to keep a gift is sought. The postulant master authorizes any necessary expenditures for the postulant.
- d) Smoking: If the postulant smokes, the postulancy is generally the period in which he will discontinue this practice.
- e) Recreation: Postulants usually recreate with the monastic community. Depending on circumstances, the postulant master may at times make other provisions.
- f) Radio, CD player, television, & laptop/desktop computer: The postulant is not to have a radio, tape or CD player in his room. Use of a personal laptop/computer or the use of the monastery's computer lab is determined case by case. Community television may be watched with moderation.
- g) Mail: Incoming mail is distributed by the postulant master. Outgoing mail is to be given to him sealed.
- h) Absence from the property: Permission to leave the St. Bede grounds is sought from the postulant master.

- i) Visits: The postulant master determines the length and frequency of visits, which ordinarily will be restricted to family members; he is to be informed beforehand about the time of visits.
- j) Confessors: Priest-monks will be recommended by the abbot to be confessors for the postulants. If someone else is desired as a regular confessor, the postulant master is to be consulted.
- k) Time away from the abbey: Since the postulancy is a period of transition, some opportunity is to be given the postulant to be away from the abbey so that he can reflect on his experience here. When the length of postulancy has been determined, and according to the circumstances of each postulant, times for a weekend or longer absences will be determined.

## **Section Six: Transition to the Novitiate**

A) Self-Evaluation by the Postulant: Toward the end of the designated time for postulancy, the postulant, under the direction of the postulant master, will undertake a process of self-evaluation. If this process seems to indicate that he is called to our way of life, he will apply to the abbot for admission to the novitiate. The postulancy may be prolonged for a reasonable cause.

B) Evaluation by the abbot and Community: After the postulant applies for admission to the novitiate, the abbot, in the light of his experience of the postulant and in view of the reports and recommendation of the postulant master, will decide whether to present him to the chapter for admission to the novitiate. With the consent of the chapter, the abbot may admit a suitable candidate to the novitiate (*The Constitutions and the Directory of the American-Cassinese Congregation* C 38.1).

C) Retreat: If the postulant is accepted for the novitiate, the postulant master is to arrange a three-day retreat for him in preparation for the novitiate. If circumstances allow, arrangements are also to be made for a brief home visit before the retreat.

D) Communication with the Novice Master: Before the novitiate begins, the postulant master will give the file on the future novice to the novice master and discuss with him the future novice's needs and how these may be addressed in the novitiate program.